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Point Reyes National Seashore News Release

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Historic West Marin Radio Station Will Celebrate Marconi Event

The public is invited to see Morse operators in action

Historic west Marin Morse code radio station KPH, and its amateur radio counterpart K6KPH, will be on the air on 12 December 2001 to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first wireless signal to cross the Atlantic received by Marconi on 12 December 1901 at St. John's Newfoundland.

Both stations will use the transmitters, receivers and antennas of famous ex-RCA coast station KPH, some of which date from the 1950s. The transmitters are located at the transmitting station founded by the American Marconi Co. in 1913 at Bolinas. The receivers and operators will be at the KPH receiving station about 20 miles north of Bolinas at Point Reyes.

KPH and K6KPH will be open for calls from other Morse stations around the world including those at Poldhu in the UK, the site from which the original Marconi signal was sent, and St. John's, Newfoundland where Marconi faintly heard the three dots of the letter S in his earphone. Commemorative radiogram messages will be exchanged with selected stations.

The public is invited to attend the event beginning at 12 noon to hear for themselves the music of Morse code sent by some of the profession's best operators. Operations are expected to continue into the late evening. The receiving station is located at 17400 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, the road to the Point Reyes Lighthouse, in the Point Reyes National Seashore. Visitors should look for the tree lined driveway to the north of the road.

KPH began its life at the dawn of radio. Its first home was the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, from which it derived its first call letters, PH. After the 1906 earthquake and fire the station moved to several locations. These included Green Street in San Francisco (where the neighbors were kept awake by the crashing din of the rotary spark gap transmitter), Hillcrest in Daly City (where the operators were plagued by the local skunks) and Marshall on the east shore of Tomales Bay at the long wave receiving station. Eventually the KPH transmitters found a permanent home on the mesa west of Bolinas while the receiving station and control point was established on the mesa at Point Reyes.

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Along the way federal regulators added the K prefix to the original PH, creating KPH, one of the most famous radio call signs in the world, the KPH signal literally spanned the globe. Radio operators on ships in the far corners of the world were comforted by the steady signal of KPH in their earphones.

As technology progressed the end of Morse code was predicted many times. But at Point Reyes the Morse keys still clicked as KPH soldiered on providing good, reliable service to the maritime community. The end came at Bolinas and Point Reyes in 1997 when Globe Wireless purchased the license and the big transmitters were finally shut down. It was the last time the famous call KPH would be sent from Bolinas - or so it was thought. But on December 12th the station will once again be heard on the air.

Today the former KPH facilities are part of the Point Reyes National Seashore, which has a strong interest in the important role the station played in the history of radio communications. The Maritime Radio Historical Society is working with Point Reyes National Seashore to preserve and restore KPH with the goal of creating a museum dedicated to this great station that was once heard daily around the world.

Further information may be found on the Maritime Radio Historical Society Web site at www.radiomarine.org.

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